



PLANNING SUMMER WITH YOUR TEEN

It'll soon be summertime, and the living may not be as easy for your children as it was for you. This is especially true for kids who are entering or into their teenage years. You may remember summer vacation as carefree and fun, when the school year's end meant more free time and outdoor activities. Or perhaps you recall taking steps toward independence, such as getting your first job or leaving home for summer camp.

Things are probably different for your pre-teens and teens. Perhaps they've gotten used to having their summers scheduled for them, with themed camps or organized sports and a family vacation thrown in. Now, economic conditions are having an impact. Fewer families can afford camps of any kind. Local governments are cutting back on public recreation programs, and that summer job may be harder to find. How should you respond as a parent to your kids' new summer reality?

Here's one important step: Instead of planning a summer *for* your teens, plan a summer *with* your teens. That means making them partners in planning the schedule and making sure to carve out time you can spend with them over the summer. Here are some areas you might include in the discussion:

- » **A summer job:** This is the first working experience for many people. It can teach valuable life lessons, from how to apply for a job to how to manage money. You can give guidance, and talking about jobs with your teen can help clarify the options. Encourage the idea that a job isn't only about making money; it can be enjoyable and fulfilling.
- » **A summer internship:** An internship connected to a profession that interests your child, such as at a television station or a law office, could be a great summer experience. Employment laws and regulations prohibit using internships as sources of free labor. However, an operation with no formal internship program might allow a teenager who is eager to learn to come in simply as an observer for a few hours a week. Seeing what the job is really like and making connections are valuable payoffs.
- » **Volunteer service:** Employed or not, teens should be encouraged to make time to help others, including during the summer. There are lots of opportunities to do so, from volunteering for recreational programs for underprivileged children to visiting seniors in nursing homes. Again, in discussing the options, you can help your teen see where his or her interests, talents and temperament are best suited.
- » **The family vacation:** The important – and often difficult – objective is to plan a vacation that has something everyone can enjoy. Communication with your kids is the key. Go beyond asking what they want to do to discussing what interests them. There may be a fun trip that provides insight into a book, movie, music, historical event, etc. that has captured your teenager's imagination.
- » **Time with your teen:** Your children's growing independence is a reality and should be a good thing. Teenagers will want freedom in the summer months to spend time with friends and do things *they* want to do. But your time with them is important, too. Plan for it with your child. Going to sporting events, organizing a festival of family members' favorite films on DVD, cookouts, nature walks – you name it. Share activities that are engaging and spark conversation.

There are lots of other ways youngsters can spend their summer vacation. You may remember your summers as a time when you celebrated your freedom from the school-days routine by getting out and doing the things you wanted to do. As a parent now, you may worry about a wasted summer for your teenager. Instead of worrying, sit down to talk about it. You may find that he or she is just as eager for a full summer as you were.

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